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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000947

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DEPT FOR P, EU, NEA, PM, IO, AND NSC

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TAGS: MARR MOPS PREL LE EI

SUBJECT: IRELAND CONSIDERING TROOP CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXPANDED UNIFIL

REF: STATE 134133

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Jonathan Benton; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶11. (C) This is an action request. See para 7.

¶12. (C) Summary: Ireland is actively considering contributions to the expanded UNIFIL mission under UNSC Resolution 1701, according Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) officials. Before deciding on contributions, however, the Irish Government would need clarity on issues relating to the expanded UNIFIL force, such as the rules of engagement in Lebanon. Ireland would have roughly 150 troops available to provide to UNIFIL, which could conceivably fill the niche role of light-armed reconnaissance units. The DFA officials noted that the politically necessary steps of securing Government and Parliamentary approval for Irish troop contributions made it difficult to speculate on the time required to deploy Irish soldiers to UNIFIL. Action Request: Post would appreciate USG information on the capabilities and vulnerabilities of the Lebanese military (including, possibly, any off-the-shelf assessments) that we could share with the Irish Government to help in its deliberations on UNIFIL participation. End summary and request.

Ireland Considering UNIFIL Role

¶13. (C) Ireland is actively considering troop contributions to the expanded UNIFIL mission under UNSC Resolution 1701, beyond the five Irish observers who currently participate in UNIFIL and twelve Irish soldiers stationed with other UN missions in the Middle East, according to Brian Cahalane and Stephen Dawson, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Acting Directors of the UN and Middle East Sections, respectively, to whom emboffs delivered reftel demarche on August 16. Cahalane said that the Irish Government, before deciding on contributions, would seek clarity on questions relating to UNIFIL's new mandate, particularly the rules of engagement in Lebanon and the role to be played by current UNIFIL participants. He noted that the scheduled August 17 UN PKO-organized meeting for potential troop contributors would likely address these questions, following on the August 14 PKO meeting that the Irish UN mission had attended. Cahalane and Dawson observed that demarche points on UN compensation would not be an issue, as the Irish Government would not seek reimbursement for transportation, equipment, or troops above UN standard rates.

Available Numbers

¶4. (C) Ireland would have roughly 150 troops available to contribute to UNIFIL, said Cahalane. He explained that, under the UN Stand-by Arrangements System, total Irish troop contributions to UN missions were capped at 850 (or ten percent of Irish defense forces), and approximately 700 Irish soldiers were now serving in UN missions worldwide. Dawson said that the 15,000-troop target for the expanded UNIFIL force seemed reachable, with recent troop commitments from EU countries, including 3,000 soldiers reportedly promised by Italy. Dawson recalled that the August 14 PKO meeting had discussed UNIFIL's need for light-armed reconnaissance units, a niche role that Ireland could conceivably play with its relatively small troop contribution.

Timing Difficulties

¶5. (C) Cahalane and Dawson observed that Ireland's legislation-based "triple-lock" policy made it difficult to speculate on the time required to deploy Irish personnel to UNIFIL. (Under the triple-lock policy, Ireland can deploy forces overseas if there is a UN mandate for the mission and if both the Government administration and Irish Parliament approve.) According to Cahalane, UNSC Resolution 1701 satisfied the UN component of the triple lock. The remaining issues, he continued, were the speed with which the Government could decide on troop contributions and the possible challenge in recalling Parliament, which was not due to reconvene from summer recess until late September. Dawson remarked that, legally, the triple lock had already been satisfied for Irish participation in UNIFIL, a mission in which Irish forces had served for over 20 years.

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Politically, however, the more dangerous nature of UNIFIL's new mandate would require renewed authorization from the Government and Parliament. Given these necessary political steps, Dawson believed that Irish soldiers "would not be among the first off the planes in Lebanon."

¶6. (C) Dawson refuted August 15 Irish newspaper reports that Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora had contacted Irish representatives directly to request troop commitments. Dawson said that a recent discussion in Cairo between the Lebanese charge d'affaires and the Irish ambassador had been the only government-to-government communication on UNIFIL to date.

Request: USG Information on Lebanese Forces

¶7. (C) Action Request: Cahalane and Dawson asked whether the USG might have information on the capabilities and vulnerabilities of the Lebanese military (including, possibly, any off-the-shelf assessments) that could be shared with the Irish Government as it considers adding troops to UNIFIL. Post would appreciate receiving any such material, which would help Ireland to determine the specific role that it could play in Lebanon.

BENTON